

The Throne Hospital and early Plastic Surgery in Northern Ireland

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The Throne Hospital was built on a 28 acres site on the northern outskirts of Belfast and was opened in October 1874 as a convalescent hospital for children and adults; by its location it was well removed from the grimy atmosphere of central Belfast. Donations were headed by the Martin family from Killyleagh in memory of their son who had recently died from an infectious disease. Other significant contributions were donated by families whose names were associated with the Belfast Royal Hospital; they are recorded in Dr Sidney Allison's "The Seeds of Time"¹ in which he refers to the incorporation of the new hospital with the newly-created Royal Belfast Hospital, formerly the Frederick Street Hospital. The first annual report refers to 32 beds in two wards, 12 of which were designated the Martin Children's Beds for "spinal cases". In general, it is clear that most of the patients suffered from spinal and hip disease and various glandular swelling and that most of these surgical conditions were tuberculous in origin. Transfers from the Royal Hospital were admitted and were under the care of Dr H C Manley, a local general practitioner. Adult transfers had to await the completion of the hospital which was not finished until 1877. A surplus of 20 acres was leased for housing development, the income from which contributed to the running of the hospital. The Belfast Royal Hospital report for 1884 reflects the convalescent nature of the hospital where each bed was occupied by less than three patients per year. By comparison the Children's Hospital and the Ulster Hospital for Women and Children, each had approximately eight patients per bed per year. An additional unit was opened in 1885 for treatment of advanced pulmonary tuberculosis. This declined in importance when the Forster Green Hospital was established in 1896, but there were still ten beds for this purpose in 1903. It was under the care of the Royal Hospital physicians, successively Dr (later Professor) James Lindsay, Strafford Smith and William Calwell.

The first lady superintendent was Miss Markham. In 1878 she was followed by Mrs E A Shiel and

in 1887 Miss M F Bostock was appointed, who later became the first matron of the new Royal Hospital in 1902. Subsequent matrons were Miss Mildred from Grantham in 1902-09, Miss Hilson from the Royal Victoria Hospital 1909-36 and Miss Magee, a former sister in the Throne Hospital from 1936-48. She was followed by Miss Betty Boyce who went to South Tyrone Hospital in 1951. Miss J McCollam took over and continued until 1955 when she was replaced by Miss Agnes Campbell. Miss Campbell continued at the Throne Hospital until a few years before its closure and the last few years of the hospital were supervised by Miss Ann Burnside from the Royal.

In the early years surgical procedures were carried out in the Royal and Children's hospitals before the patients were transferred to the Throne Hospital, but the 1881 Annual Report has the statement "Seven operations were performed during the year, chloroform being administered in each case". The surgery was presumably carried out by Dr H C Manley and there were rarely more than 20 operations per year. Manley, who was appointed medical officer when the hospital opened, retired in 1900 and was replaced by surgeon Thomas Sinclair Kirk, assisted by Robert Reid as medical officer. Kirk was appointed Attending Surgeon to the Royal Victoria Hospital in 1902 and from this date all operations were carried out by Howard Stevenson although he was not officially appointed as Kirk's assistant until 1909. The hospital which then was known as the Martin Children's Hospital was mainly engaged in the management of patients with tuberculosis.

Theatre records are available from 1901. The numbers of operations vary from 50-150 per year and most of these were performed on children and young adults with tuberculosis e.g. psoas abscess, curettage, gland drainage, joint excision

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and amputation. Mr Stevenson remained on the visiting staff of the Royal Victoria Hospital until 1941 and continued to carry out most of the operations in the Throne Hospital. He retired from the Throne in 1944 and there-after no designated general surgeon was appointed to its staff. Anaesthetics were administered by "H S". There was no House Surgeon so presumably the anaesthetic was also given by the same person and I note also that Matron on one occasion gave the anaesthetic.

Tuberculosis, which was the common disease, can be identified in 60% of the procedures in 1902, and many other drainage and abscess operations, not specified, may well have been the same disease. In 1910 the figure was not greatly changed at 50% and in 1924 the figure was less than 20%. In 1935 out of a total of 65 operations, only two were for tuberculosis.

In the late thirties "H S" was still doing most of the operating and I note that in 1938 C J A Woodside performed a number of operations. In the early forties the pattern of activity changed and more readily recognizable names appeared on the operating list. These were Wilfred Brennen, in 1942, Bill Coyle in 1943, Daniel Chapman in 1944, John McKee 1945, Walter Braidwood, John Pyper, Hugh Bailie and Mr Coyle in 1946. Most of the surgery performed by these gentlemen was "radical cure of hernia". The notable event of the war years was a direct hit from a bomb during the air raids of 1941, which fortunately caused no casualties. Over the years 1947-1949 many of the doctors became surgeons. These were Messrs. Arthur Stevenson, Herbie Dales, Ernest Morrison, Ronnie Loan, Smith (?R P) and a separately identified W F (Bill) Smith. The numbers of operations also steadily rose from 175 in 1944 to 220 in 1949. W Lennon is recorded as having manipulated rheumatoid joints on 17.10.49.

In the late forties and early fifties more familiar anaesthetists also appeared including Martin (Mac) Shaw, Harold Jefferson, Stafford Geddis, Charles Reid and Maurice Brown.

The medical side of the Throne Hospital was essentially convalescent and long-stay throughout this century. The physicians-in-charge were general practitioners from Whiteabbey: Robert Reid from 1900 until death in 1937, followed by T Lawrence Ross and David Wilson into the 1940s. William Lennon, consultant rheumatologist at the Royal Victoria Hospital

had beds in the Throne Hospital until his retirement in 1966. In addition, of course, the consultants of the Royal Victoria Hospital had over all responsibility for many of the patients who were simply "boarded out" in the Throne Hospital.

The first Plastic Surgical operation recorded was on 3.9.50 when a fractured malar with facial scars was operated on by N C Hughes and on 7.9.50 a cross-leg flap was delayed and on 11.9.50 an abdominal tube pedicle was raised. On 18.9.50 a Dupuytren's contracture was corrected. For the remainder of that year there were 100 plastic surgical operations and a total of 220 general surgical operations performed by most of the forementioned general surgeons. David Gilchrist was the first anaesthetist and Bob Gilmore, who at that time was a senior registrar, replaced him when he moved to London a year later.

In 1951 Johnny Boyd, Paddy Creighton and Myles Gilligan were operating on the general patients with the anaesthetists above-named plus Harold Love and James Sutcliffe. In that year there was a total of 750 operations, 459 plastic and 291 general surgery. In 1952 the general surgeons were Ronnie Dickson, Myles Gilligan, Willoughby Wilson and James Kyle. Out of 730 operations 191 were general and 539 plastic. In 1953 the "visiting surgeons" were Willoughby Wilson, Reggie Livingston, Alex. McCalister and John B. Lowry.

In 1953 the newly appointed R I H (Roy) Whitlock's first operation was for osteomyelitis of the mandible. Later that year Dr Kyle had become Mr Kyle and 259 general surgical operations and 577 plastic operations were recorded. Additional anaesthetists included T A (Bertie) Browne and Gerald Black.

On 6.6.54 John Gorman removed impacted wisdom teeth. The general surgeons were Brian Smith, Willoughby Wilson, Myles Gilligan, Reggie Livingston and Millar Bell, and anaesthetists Robert Nicholl, Keith (Tub) Morrow, Bob Gilmore, Hugh Graham and Colin Boyd.

In that year 262 general surgical and 592 plastic surgical operations were performed. In 1955 the general surgeons were Messrs. Kyle, Bell, Livingston, Jack McCready and Cecil Maltby, and the anaesthetic staff was reinforced by Bob Gray. Jimmy Piggot and Kenneth Orr performed

minor surgical operations, giving their own anaesthetic. A total of 695 plastic operations and 190 general surgical operations were accounted for in 1955.

In 1956 a James Blundell was included in the surgical listings and Andrew Scott and J (Mac) Clarke anaesthetised. Registrars Ryan and Costello were also noted to have operated; 707 plastic and 262 general surgical operations were performed.

In 1957 Ernest Kemp and Basil Gray performed minor skin grafting operations and Bill Costello, John Lowry and Reggie Livingston made frequent general surgical appearances as did Ian Murphy and Pat Allen on occasional lists. On the dental side Ian Finlay on various lists removed impacted wisdom teeth. A typical list for Norman Hughes is represented by the elevation of a tube pedicle on the arm for the loss of a nasal columella, the excision of scars on chin, lip and forehead, a wedge resection of a growth of the upper lip and sequestrectomy of a fractured tibia and fibula. A list by Dickie the following day included composite graft for the loss of the right side of the nose, removal of a neurofibroma from a thenar eminence, repair of a palate fistula, amputation of a contracted little finger, the removal of a growth from a foot, and grafting of burns to face, legs and hand. Typical dental lists always included at least two cases with impacted wisdom teeth and usually a fractured mandible. A general surgical list usually included either one or two hernias and at least one set of varicose veins which were stripped or ligated. In that year 762 plastic and 298 general surgical operations were performed. The year 1958 includes references to Joe Kennedy who performed minor plastic operations, and Ivan Johnston (who later that year appeared as Mr Ivan Johnstone) and Stewart Clarke and Dick Tooth who did some of the surgical lists which were again mainly done by Messrs. Livingston and Costello. Brian Sommersgill also appeared frequently in the dental surgical lists. Mr Gorman's name also in the latter part of that year appeared more regularly in the dental lists. For that year there were 1050 plastic cases and 243 general. In 1959 Hume Logan and Donal McWilliams, and Donald Hancock, appeared as occasional alternatives to Livingston in doing the general surgical lists. The total of plastic and dental procedures was 1138 and general surgery 180. The following year (1959) saw the introduction of an Australian,

Jim Poate as a plastic surgical registrar and thereafter his name appeared regularly in the plastic surgical operating lists. The additional general surgical operators included James Milliken and Ivor Heath; George Emerson also appears for the first time on the oral and maxillo-facial side. David Hadden, who was a houseman, also performed a number of minor skin grafting operations. For 1960, 1284 plastic and dental, and 157 general operations were performed.

In 1961 Professor Rodgers is noted to have repaired a left inguinal hernia on 8.2.61. Owen Tuohy also appears in the oral maxillo-facial lists and W J H (Billy) Graham on the plastic surgical lists. In September, 1961 John Robb appears on the general surgical lists and alternated with Livingston in that capacity for the remainder of the year. The new anaesthetists included Michael Lewis and Moira Hainsworth. The total for 1961 were plastic 686, dental 502, combined 19 and general 128, and emergencies (for the first time identified) 37. 1962 saw the inclusion of Peter Baskett as an anaesthetist and Roy Gibson and John Robb as a plastic surgical registrar and Dr Watson appears in the general surgical list. The numbers were plastic 778, dental 487, combined 24, general 155 (1962).

In 1963 Claire McWilliam and Morrell Lyons appeared in the anaesthetic registrar list. George Emerson appears on the oral surgical side (as senior registrar) and Vance Mitchell appears on the plastic side as S H O. John Robb was replaced by John Colville (senior registrar). The totals for that year were 779 plastic, 562 dental, 26 combined, 180 general and 22 emergencies. In 1964 Douglas George is noted on the general surgical lists and John Cronhelm and Brian Nixon appear as anaesthetic registrars. Ronnie Slater joined the Unit as senior registrar in February 1964 and from then onwards the senior registrars undertook first call for emergencies on alternate weeks until 1968. One emergency comes to mind on 31.3.64, the patient (T M) aged 69 years was admitted with multiple injuries following a road traffic accident. His surgery included laparotomy with repair of multiple perforations of the large bowel, supra-pubic drainage for a bladder injury, reduction wiring of a Le-Fort III facial fracture plus repair of multiple facial lacerations. This was all done without recourse to x-ray or blood and the patient was admitted to the Throne Hospital rather than to the Royal, (where most of the emergencies were done) on account of the

apparent predominance of the facial injuries. In the latter part of 1964 Terry Shaw joined the Unit as a rotating general surgical registrar and Mr Prasad joined as an oral surgical registrar. The 1964 figures were 897 plastic, 643 dental, 20 combined and 157 general surgical most of which were done by Mr Livingston. There were 39 emergencies. In 1967 J A (Alfie) Moore joined as a consultant anaesthetist and Roy Millar was one of the housemen on rotation from the Royal. Hume Logan was a general surgical senior registrar on rotation for a period. The 1967 figures were 1308 plastic, 653 dental, 14 combined, 164 general surgery and 75 emergencies.

Before continuing with the Plastic Surgery Unit's development at the Ulster Hospital, it is worth mentioning a few other developments and milestones at the Throne.

Until 1954 all surgery was conducted in a small theatre sited midway between the two floors. Patients were manhandled up and down stairs to and from this little theatre. This rapidly became unsatisfactory due to the increase in numbers and also the complexity of the surgery. A gift of £15,000 from the Royal Victoria Hospital Ex-Patients' Guild made possible the building of a new twin-theatre suite plus sterilizing areas and changing rooms. The Northern Ireland Hospitals' Authority contributed a further £10,000 to complete this and to provide air conditioning. The old theatre became a dental surgery and even for that it was comparatively inadequate. It was not until 1964 that a bed-lift was installed enabling patients to be brought to and particularly from theatre in their own bed.

In that same year most of the R V H convalescent beds were reallocated to Plastic and General Surgery, providing 57 plastic surgical beds and 12 general surgical beds.

In 1964 a training school for State Enrolled Nurses was opened and in the same year an electric hoist for the transfer of severely burnt patients from their beds to a saline bath greatly facilitated the otherwise very painful handling of these patients and saved the nurses a lot of heavy lifting.

In 1962 the Working Men's Committee paid for a Dental Laboratory, staffed by Mr Walter Hamilton and an assistant technician.

The author who had been introduced to microsurgery in Pittsburg in 1966 continued with the adaption of the operating microscope to

clinical needs. The absence of bureaucratic red tape allowed a very expensive operating microscope, designed for the Plastic Unit in the Ulster Hospital (to be opened two years later) to be delivered to the Throne Hospital. Small animals had to be transferred to the Throne (in the boot of the author's car) and used in the familiarisation with small vessel anastomosis. These were transported from the Department of Clinical Science Animal House and back again if they survived the kidney transfer that was the index of successful small vessel anastomosis. This was followed the next year by clinical application to revascularisation and nerve repair.

No history of the Throne Hospital would be complete without special reference to "Mac", Miss F E McKenzie, a New Zealand nurse who worked in East Grinstead with Norman Hughes, and who came to Belfast at the inception of the Unit as the Plastic Surgical Ward Sister. With only the interest of the patients at heart she was the bane of all who came under her influence, housemen and consultants alike. Her professionalism and clinical judgement were highly respected. Many young girls started their nursing career as probation nurses at the Throne prior to commencing their formal Nurse Training at the Royal. Mac's regimental style tempered with kindness was a memorable introduction to Nursing for many young women in their formative years.

The final plastic surgical operation on 29.11.68 was the removal of an impacted wisdom tooth under general anaesthesia by John Gorman; the patient was anaesthetised by Bob Gilmore. On 4.12.68, Plastic Surgery was transferred to The Ulster Hospital Dundonald. General surgery on a reduced scale continued for some years until eventually the hospital reverted to a convalescent unit. It was finally closed on 4 November, 1992.

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REFERENCES

The main sources for this article have been the Annual Reports for the Throne Hospital, included in the Annual Reports of the Royal and Royal Victoria Hospitals from 1874-1948, also the theatre records from 1901 onwards. The Medical Directory has been used for more accurate identification of doctors.

1. Allison R S. *The Seeds of Time*. Belfast, Brough, Cox and Dunn, 1972.